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Roma Gail Billups

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Roma Gail Billups
July 19, 1984
HISTORY OF CEREDO
WVC-C-2

COMPLETED

Jim: ...This is Jim Deeter, History student at Marshall University, interviewing Mrs. J. J. Billups, who is church clerk for the 1st Baptist Church in Ceredo. Uh, (train in background), July, and that's a train going by, so whoever transcribes this will have to listen to the train, on July the 19th, 1984. This interview is conducted uh, as a part of an Oral History of the History of Ceredo for History 580 in the second summer session of 1984. Mrs. Billups, let me just ask you some personal things about your personal life and your own recollection. Just tell me basically where you were born, where you grew up, uh, if from ...you're a resident long-term or life-time resident of Ceredo, that kind of thing. Just tell me about yourself.

Roma: Okay, I was born in 1931, November the 26th, out on Route 75 out of Kenova. And of course back then you didn't go to the hospital; I was born at home. I was there until uh, I was 16 years old, at which time I entered St. Mary's School of Nursing. And uh, I did belong to the Ebenezer Baptist Church. And after graduating in 19 and 52, uh, I worked a couple of years for Dr. Clark, and then in 19 and 54, I was at the drugstore one day and this nice looking young man came in and ended up my husband (laughs)...and uh, immediately after we were married, I moved my letter to the 1st Baptist Church of Ceredo. (any particular reason you did that?) I think ...I feel that everyone should belong to the church in their community or should support the church in their community. And I would have had to gone 3 miles back out in the country to go back to my church, and I felt like I should go to his church. So, that's why I...(your husband was a member of this church when you married?)...yes, he was, yes, he was.

Jim: So you joined this church in 1954? (yes, sir) So, you have 30 years of memories here. You've been an ongoing member here for 30 years? (yes, sir) Great, great. Tell me about your family. How many children do you have?

Roma: I have three sons, John, Mike, and Jim. And uh, anyone that reads the newspapers, especially back from about mmh, '60...'67-'70, uh, read a lot about the Billups boys at Ceredo-Kenova High School, they all played on championship ball teams. Two of 'em were all state ends. And the other one was a uh, he was the center. He tossed the ball around. And two of 'em are now married, John the oldest one is 29. He's married and has three children; two little girls and a little boy. Michael is 26; he's married and he has a little girl and a little boy. J.D.'s now 24 and still living at home; we can't get rid of him. (I've got two that way). (laughter) He's quite a...he's quite a young man. I'm very, very proud of the boys. They gave us no trouble whatsoever, and uh, John lives in Summit, Kentucky and he's uh, a member and an RA director for the uh, Rose Hill Baptist Church and his wife is the GA director. And Michael, my middle son, was just ordained a deacon here at the 1st Baptist Church of Ceredo, just a few months ago. And J.D. has a single's class and he conducts a Bible study at our home about every Thursday night, except during the summer months, they decided they would all be so busy that

they had better disband it 'til this fall. And he's a usher at church, very active. (mmmh) So we've been blessed by the Lord.

Jim: Sounds like your family's been involved in this church then for 30 years right on, even through your three boys. Well, see two of 'em are, well, one of 'em's gone, one of them's still in the area, right? (mmm-hmm) And the other one's still at home?

Roma: Yes, sir, yes, sir.

Jim: That's great, that's great. Do you feel like your boys turned out to be good boys, obviously, that you said you made the statement that they gave you no trouble uh, do you feel the church had a part to play in that, or maybe...

Roma: Yes, I feel like the church, of course, I've been strong in prayer with the Lord ever since they were born, that he would help me to bring them up in the way they should be brought up and that he would watch over them. And I really give him all the credit (sure, yeah). But they were in church from the time they were born and in the nursery roll, uh, were made to go to church on Sunday morning. Uh, when they were small, we didn't have too many young people in the church, their age, so, we did not make them go or force them to go on Sunday night or Wednesday night, but they knew without any argument at all that on Sunday morning that they got up and went to Sunday School and Church. And they have never gone away from the church. But in talking with different people and some in fact, some ministers' daughters that I have talked to, that was absolutely made to go to church every time the doors were open, even on Wednesday night when they couldn't even go to a ballgame at school, became very embittered about this and when they got married, they quit the church period. Now, they did come back, because the scripture's says they will come back because the scriptures says they will come back (mmm-hmm), but because of the way they had to do at home, they quit going to church, and even became messy housekeepers because they had to keep everything up and spic and span all the time. (mmh) But made a turn about later on (mmm-hmm), but uh, I don't believe a child should be forced to go to every uh, service because it...sometimes they have things at school that that's the only time they can go is maybe on a Wednesday night. But I do believe that they should be compelled to go at least on Sunday morning.

Jim: Your work right now is the church clerk, right? (yes, sir) How long have you been doing that?

Roma: I've only been church clerk about 3 years.

Jim: Tell me about what your duties are basically?

Roma: I take the minutes of business meetings, I send for letters, requested letters and send out letters that other churches have requested to us. Uh, make the annual report to the Southern Baptist WV Convention. (You've been doing that for about 3 years?) Yes, sir.

Jim: Uh, did you attend business meetings regularly before you were clerk? (yes, sir) So you have some knowledge of the last 25 or 30 years as to how the business was conducted and kind of how the church has gone over the last 30 years? (Yes, sir) You have first-hand knowledge of that? Uh, have you done anything else in the church, have you had any other offices or...?

Roma: I've been...I've taught uh, 5th and 6th grade girls for three or four years. I'm in the choir, I'm a regular choir member and have been since well, for 30 years. (mmmh) Uh, I now teach the adult at the Ceredo Manor Highrise. (you have a special class there that you teach?) A special Sunday School class; they requested this because they have several people in wheelchairs, walkers, very, very hard for them to get out to a church. Because of not having the adequate transportation. And they requested would anyone be willing to come over and have a Sunday School with them, Bible study. I first said no, or I never did say no, I said uh, I'd think about it. I was worried because I had not taught adults before, only children. And I really didn't feel worthy. I figured they would probably teach me a whole lot more than I could teach them. But I prayed about it and I just said, Lord, you know me and you know that by myself I can't do it, but if you, you know, if you show me that you want me to, I'll try. I'll do it. And I just all of a sudden said I'd do it. And I have not been sorry. It's been going on now about nearly a year. And uh, we average about 10 in our Sunday School. And uh, really it's turned out to be a real good thing. I have learned a lot from them, as well as been able to teach them some things (good). We have a real good Sunday School.

Jim: Good. What does your husband do? Does he have anything to do in the church? Tell me about his job first.

Roma: Well, John is head of the engineering department with the KY/WV Gas Company. The mother company's Equitable Gas Company out of Pittsburg, and John has I don't know exactly at what age, I believe around 15 years of age, he uh, because a Christian. Uh, he was in...he served in the service from about '46 or no, let's see...from about '50 to '54 (mmm-hmm), and he was in the Air Force. And uh, let's see...(pause),...

Jim: You say you met him in a drugstore?

Roma: I met him at the corner drugstore.

Jim: And you kind of fell for this young guy and you all were married in 1954?

Roma: I met him in September, I got my engagement ring for my birthday in November and we were married in January. (laughs)

Jim: How about that! That's great. Does he...does he hold any offices in the church now?

Roma: Yes, sir, he is a usher, he is a deacon (mmmh), he's inactive right now, or rather he's on standby. He'll be put back on the deacon's board when his time rolls around again. (mmm-hmm) He teaches uh, the Hollywood class, they call theirselves the Hollywood class. (why do they call themselves the Hollywood class?) They think they're that good looking!

Jim: Oh, I see.

Roma: Just a joke really. (right, I understand) Uh, he uh, did lead the church uh, congregational singing. He cannot carry a tune very well. But John tries and he loves to sing. Uh, so he led the singing for several years, prior to our new choir director and her husband. Her husband now leads the congregational singing. John's a very strong part of our church. His father passed away at the age of 48 in 19 and 46, was a very stalwart part of the church. Uh, he was deacon, sang in the choir, had a good bass voice uh, was well respected in the whole community by everybody. He was uh, vice-president of the First Bank of Ceredo for about well, I don't know just exactly, maybe 15 years, I'm not sure about that. I know he worked there, that's about the only place he worked...till he passed away. So John sort of stepped into his shoes. (mmm-hmm) And uh, quells most all uprisings in the church. He has a way about him that he can go to the people that's upset and calm 'em down and (train in background), they all look up to him, really.

Jim: Let's go back to your early recollections of the church. You were a gal from out in the country, kind of, you met a city boy and married him, (yes, sir), uh, tell me how you felt about the church when you first came into the church, and what it was like, and just kind of ramble, reminisce with me about how the church was when you firstwhat was the pastors name?

Roma: The pastors name uh, was Messinger (Messinger, I saw that name), he was uh, a converted jew (mmmh?!) and they had about six children, five or six children. And uh, he had resigned, he resigned right after John and I were married, so I only knew him for a very short while but he was very well-loved in the community. Was a person that would just walk in and sit down and have a cup of coffee with you anytime, he didn't feel like he had to be invited. And after he left, we had a little tiny fellow by the name of Patton. Patton came I would think in about '54, yeah, he was, he was the next pastor; he came in '54, stayed 'til about '59. Uh, (train in background), wasn't dynamic in the pulpit at all. He read his sermons, but a very likeable man. But the church under Brother Patton did not grow too awful much. Uh, he was not a visiting pastor. He didn't do a lot of visiting. He would go to the hospital or if someone needed someone in the home. But just to come in and sit down and chat with you, he wasn't too much of a visiting pastor. We all loved him; very good fellow. (mmm-hmm) And uh, when I started going to this church, in 1954, you could actually count the men on one hand. (really?) There were very, very few men in the church. (train in background)

The women...if it hadn't been for the women in this community, I think the church would have folded.

Jim: That's interesting. Why do you think that uh, that is the case? Why do you think that is the case? There were more women than men?

Roma: I don't know, really don't know unless it was just the fact that the church did not get out and work the community (mmm-hmm). They were just sort of in a rut, you know, some of the older people of the church will get in a rut and they don't want nothing changed. Uh, and I feel probably it was because they did not get out and you know, really try to get more people in.

Jim: Uh, do you have any idea why this church was started in the beginning? You ever hear any of the old people, say that were here maybe when you started? Back in I guess the church started in 1884 uh, I guess there's some disagreement when actually it started, 1884, 1886, but have you heard them say why this church started, why they decided to have a 1st Baptist Church of Ceredo?

Roma: No, I haven't. I...the one lady that could probably tell you more than anybody else and uh, is Elsie Tredway, a member of our church. (I saw...I saw her name; is she still alive?) Mmm-hmm, she lives in the manor. She lives in the manor (I see). She had a leg removed a few years back with cancer, but Elsie's uh, Elsie's still one of our staunch members, never misses a service unless she's sick. But she did a complete history on the church. In fact, A.W. Ball was one of the first ministers of the church, which was her, I believe her grandfather. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Alright, you came in the church in '54, let's move ahead a little bit to around '62 or '64 and start from there. What...how do you feel the church was different or was it different or how do you see the church compared to 1954 to 1964? Ten year span in there?

Roma: Not too much difference.

Jim: What was the main mission of the church at that time? Did the church have a mission? Did it have some direction that it was going in or was it kind of floatin' along?

Roma: Floatin' along. Floatin' along. Our church to tell you the truth, our church has floated along until this Dr. Armstrong to that, we had been very limited in our equipment, our physical facilities and so forth. And during his tenure, why we like I said, formalized training programs were developed internally. We improved considerably in equipment, and so forth. Our physical facilities were altered considerably, so we started taking on a more professional image-type, as far as the entire organization. We had never before done...well, we had, I think gone through the community one time door to door and asked if they belonged to the church, if they were a Christian, if ...and invited them but then that was it. There was no followups or anything like that.

(mmm-hmm) In the last 2 years we've been having the little summer missionaries coming in two of 'em at a time, staying with members of the church. I have two right now. And uh, doing uh, a survey in Ceredo and Kenova, out Route 75 (mmm-hmm). And then we take the names from these cards of the unchurch people, we go visit 'em. We have a visitation program now, something that we did not have for several years (mmm-hmm). Uh, maybe two or three of the older members of the church would go out on their own, visit the sick, but we just, well, we were spiritually dead, now.

Jim: Do you think Dr. Armstrong has been used of the Lord to really...stir you and get you going again?

Roma: Well, see, when our last minister resigned, he had been with us for 10 years (what was his name?) Hubert Six (Hubert Six). As fine a man as ever lived. Not a dynamic minister. A minister that told me one time, "I'm basically a very shy person." Uh, Hubert Six was very uncomfortable in the pulpit because he was standing in front of a bunch of people. But he had a nervous habit of going from one foot to the other, and a lot of people would watch his actions, and watch him stagger around, more so than listening to, you know, what he had to say. But it was because he was so ill at ease in front of people. And a lot of people didn't know this. He didn't tell it to everybody, but he did tell me, he said, "nobody knows what it takes for me to get up in that pulpit in front of a crowd of people and preach a sermon." (mmmh) Well, he decided to go to uh, Jacksonville, Florida and he enrolled in a hospital down there in this uh, role as Chaplain, that's becoming very popular now. Uh, a lot of the hospitals are hiring their own Chaplain to be there you know, with people. And uh, he has finished that and has uh, a hospital that he's working in down there somewhere in Florida; it's not in Jacksonville, but he's very, very pleased with it and a one on one he does much better (good). He's real pleased with it. Dr. Armstrong was our interim pastor for about 5 months. He saw in that length of time I'm sure what we lacked. (mmm-hmm) What we needed. We had uh, a Dr. John Meadows I believe the name was Meadows, I'm not positive about that last name that my husband was on the pulpit committee during this tenure and uh, this man came up and gave us a trial sermon and was uh, voted in. He was up in Pennsylvania in a church up there, very cold he said, very cold well, when you go north of the Mason-Dixon line, you get into uh, cold people. We lived in Pittsburg awhile. And they don't come to you, you have to go make your friends there. So he was wanting to get away from that area and back down this way. And he accepted one day and three days later told us, called John, told him he was sorry but he was gonna have to not take it. And his reason being that a man that was holding a revival at his church at that time from Kentucky offered him a teaching job in a christian college. He was offered this job once before and didn't take it, and said he always felt that's what the Lord wanted him to do. He's a real good history major, history of the Bible major. He said if he ever got that opportunity again, he'd not turn it down, and even though he'd already told us he'd come, when that opportunityuh, when this happened, he felt that was the Lord leading him

too, you know, giving him another chance to do what he should have done before. So we was gonna have to go look for another minister, well, some of the people came to my husband and said, well, what's wrong with Dr. Armstrong? Now, Dr. Armstrong was working as a let's see uh....(pause)...he was a workin' free of charge, he was...wasn't being paid for it. Uh...not evangelism missionary but the money what is it? When you're dealing with the money? (uh, I'm not sure what the title would be, Stewardship Committee) Stewardship, he was in stewardship (mmm-hmm) here in West Virginia and he was coming down from St. Albans, conducting our Sunday morning and Sunday night and sometimes Wednesday night services for us. (mmm-hmm). So...my husband well, one Sunday morning I drove the car, which I don't usually do but I had a lot of stuff to take out to church, and uh, after the service when John had told them that Dr. John wasn't coming, I got out to my car and John was walking home and the thought came to my mind, what...maybe the Lord, maybe the Lord would want Dr. Armstrong here. And my husband had the same thought as he was walking home. (mmmh) And there had been some people come up and say why don't you ask him, so my husband ...he approached him. And they prayed about it, he and Shirley, and he accepted. And we have just grown like everything since he took over as pastor. We have not only grown financially, but we've uh, we've got a lot of things going that we never had before. And what I mean by that is he's got committees that I've heard of, uh, committees that's really necessary to carry on the work of the church. And he knows more people across this United States, he even knows Billy Graham, he's just...(mmm-hmm_).....

Jim: What would you say uh, what percentage of the success the church is enjoying now can be attributed to Dr. Armstrong? Do you think he is the key to your improvement, obviously you're excited about the way the church has gone this last two years. Do you feel that Dr. Armstrong has been the key? (yes, sir) In what areas? Why is he different from say a Hubert Six or Mr. Mess....Pastor Messinger or someone else?

Roma: Well, I don't know....one thing is he preaches, he preaches how to be saved uh, he is the only minister....see, I...I was baptized when I was 12 years old (mmm-hmm), but I was not saved until last Easter, a year ago. I thought all this time, but I had never been told by anyone that you have to ask Christ into your heart. You know, it's not a just come up front and say I'm joining the church 'cause that's exactly what you do, you join the church (mmm-hmm), and uh, he made me see this. Uh, he knew that something wasn't right, you know, and this was before I took the Sunday School class over there uh, he could tell just in our conversation and all that something was missing. He didn't have to talk to me. But I was sitting in the choir one Sunday morning and he had preached a sermon on how to be saved and something just said to me, you're uh, you need Christ in your heart and you better go now. It was the last verse of the invitation too, because I thought...I was trying ...the devil was trying to tell me that I didn't have to go, but I knew that I did. And so I walked out. And I didn't uh, walk out, something just took me

out, 'cause like I say, I'm basically a very shy person (mmm-hmm), in a crowd especially. And uh...so I think it's the...way, the type of preaching that he does uh, I think it's his leadership, he's a good leader. He's a good pastor, and there's a difference in a preacher and a pastor (mmm-hmm), and uh, I just...I just attribute all that to his leadership. He's a dynamic person.

Jim: Let's talk a little bit about the membership of the church. Uh, how do you see the membership as being different now? You mentioned a while back in 1954 there was almost totally women in the church.

Roma: Okay. We've got many, many men now uh, I would say we have almost as many men as women, uh, a lot of our men are very active. We have I think we have more deacons now than we had then. Uh...all of our, well, no not all of 'em either. But let's see, my husband's a Sunday School teacher, Fred Adkins is a Sunday School teacher, Taylor Frazier is a Sunday School teacher uh, Richard Hodge is a Sunday School teacher. We've got an awful lot of men in our church that's takin' over Sunday School classes (mmm-hmm). We do have some women that have the children. We have uh, three ladies with adult ladies classes. That's something else we did, too. We changed our....it used to be when you went in a class when you was 18 years old, when you're 75, if you still want to be in that class, you're in it. They started a grading system, started trying to make people get out and work more to build their classes, not get satisfied with the 20 they have. But to get everybody off in their own age group, which caused us to have several more classes.

Jim: Do you think uh, you say there's more men now, than it was in 1954? Obviously that's not all Dr. Armstrong's doings, not all under his leadership, but what other than Dr. Armstrong's leadership right at this point, what else could you say was the fact, the main factor of these men coming into the church? Can you think of anything?

Roma: No. I can't right off.

Jim: Well, let me ask you this. Maybe you'll think of something later. Uh, the membership in the church now, uh, how do you...how would you evaluate the membership? Are they...are there a lot of families in the church, if there are families, are they middle-class, mostly middle-class people or upper-class or lower-class people uh, and that sort of thing. Tell me a little bit about the....

Roma: Our church is comprised I would say a little over half of 'em are middle-class and families. We have...we have a church with several widows and widowers in it. Uh, we do have some uh, I don't like to say lower-class (laughs). You know, like poor people (right) in our church and this is one thing Dr. Wade stressed very much and he'll say I hope

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Jim: Sometimes it's hard to tell (mmm-hmm).

Roma: It's gone.

Jim: Okay, I'm gonna assume, now you were saying that uh, your pastor wants to make sure your church is always welcoming everyone (right). Let me...let me ask you this. Do you feel that uh, people tend to go to a church where they feel comfortable, with people in their own social strata, people that are members of the same part of society that they're members of?

Roma: Some might, but our church has always been a church that uh, never turned you know, never shunned anybody regardless of uh, whether they were white or black or what (mmm-hmm). It just...our church has always been a very ...it's like a big loving family. It's a very loving church and strangers that come in and visit, they always say that, that this church is a very loving church and we're a very loose church. What I mean by loose is you never know on a Sunday morning who's gonna stand up and say what. Just right out of the blue, for instance. Christmas we did "The Day He Wore....no, it wasn't the Day He Wore My Crown", that's Easter, isn't it? That's what we did, we did The Day He Wore my Crown. And I have my two sons that live here, was in it; one was Pilot and one was Judas. So it was very, very uh, good. We had it Friday, Saturday and Sunday night. And a packed house every night. They did the drama. And we did the cantata. My son Mike also sings in the choir and has a real good voice but on Sunday morning when we were gonna do our last cantata that night, Dr. Armstrong said, now those of you that's missed this musical, you really missed something, you better get out, tonight's the last night. My son stands up in the choir, and says, just a minute, Dr. Armstrong. I have a little something I'd like to say about that cantata. Where's my brother Jim? So Jim comes walking up from the back where he was ushering, and they stand up there and of course, Michael has a beard because he played Pilot, he hadn't shaved it off yet. He put his arm around J.D. and he said, now look at these two faces. Now aren't these the faces of two real good lookin' fellows? He said, I'd like to know who did the pickin' of the characters in this play. Says here's Judas and here I am, Pilot. And about that time, Butch Frazier, who played Jesus, was sitting on the front row and unbeknownst to them, he got up and walked up there and kissed them both on the cheek and said, I forgive both of you. (laughs) So, that's what I mean by loose. It's not uh, everything's done like this and this and it's just if you feel like doing something, you do it. As long as it's right. And uh...

Jim: Has the church always been that way?

Roma: No, no, it's just been that way I'd say in the last about the last 10 years.

Jim: What do you think has caused this looseness, this freedom that you know and enjoy?

Roma: I think it's my husband had a lot to do with it because he's very outgoing and he could talk in front of a hundred thousand people just like he could talk in front of five. He's uh, he's very good in speech making and like I say, he's so loved by all people in this community that uh, and he started all of this, a lot of it. From you know, seeing...

Jim: So his personality was kind of...he was a deacon and kind of one of the leaders in the church (leadin' the singing) mmm-hmm.

Roma: And he had a little yellow bus and he's get that little yellow bus out once a month and now everybody that's had a birthday, had a baby, a grandchild, uh, anniversary, you come up and put your money in the little yellow bus, we use that to uh, keep the tires and gas in the van; we use that money on the van. And uh, it's just the way he (mmm-hmm), the way he conducts, you know, he...some people get up and they never smile and they just get up and do their job and sit down. And you feel this coldness; there's not this warmth (mmm-hmm) but anytime he has anything to do with it, he keeps it going.

Jim: How about the educational background of most of the church members. Uh, how would you rate that from say 1964 to 1984? Is it stayed pretty much the same? The same caliber of people in I mean, educational wise? Do you have a lot of college graduates, a few college graduates or mostly high school graduates?

Roma: We have a lot of high school and college graduates. Uh, I'd say that three-fourths of our church are all well-educated people. We don't have about ...I'd say we only have about 6 families in the church that are in the upper bracket, money-wise. We do not have no big money people. All those are down at the First Baptist in Kenova. They have most of the money people down there.

Jim: You think thats important?

Roma: No, I think that's probably part of their problem right now is they're not, they don't have a visitation program. And uh, they...they have really well, they're about as spiritually dead as we were. (mmh) If they can...right now they're without a minister. If they can just get them a real dynamic minister like we have, they'll come out of it. (mmm-hmm) In fact, we have uh, this is something that I think's very important, too. Is the fact that when Dr. Armstrong came here, we had been saving towards a new building, which we need very bad because of the uh, our building being so old, structure wise, we need a new sanctuary bad. We had approximately a hundred thousand dollars. That was over about a ten-year or twelve-year span, that we had saved that much. Dr. Armstrong came and immediately saw the need for a new sanctuary. We began to talk about it and he brought a man in with the Together We Build program. And he presented that program and we got real excited about it. And we started uh, people in the church began to say, "I'll give this much and I'll give this much", and we pledged without really signing, well, no I believe

some of 'em did sign some cards, but it was not a pledge card of which if you don't send your hundred dollars this month, we're gonna dun you. It was a sacrificial, we called it a sacrificial giving (mmm-hmm), a sacrificial pledge. If you can't meet it this month because of something, that's perfectly okay. And we had a banquet at the end of six weeks period of our pledges and everything, we had a banquet. And we had pledged \$500,000 over a 3-year period, so I think right now we're heading towards \$300,000, pretty close to it. Uh, when we reach that, we're gonna break ground and we're gonna...we'd love to be able to do it this fall, but I think we're gonna have to wait 'til spring.

Jim: Mmm-hmm. Do you feel like most of the people that are giving in the church, giving the money, that keeps the church going and for this new building you hope to build, are giving sacrificially, they're giving above and beyond what they should normally give?

Roma: For the 'Together We Build', they definitely are.

Jim: Do you think everybody contributes or is it just a handful of people or what percent?

Roma: Everybody....everybody in our church is contributing. Some of 'em it's just 50 cents a week. That's all they could, and they got up and told that. They got up and said, you know, uh, this is all we can do, above what we're giving you know, for our regular offering, this is all we feel like we can do. Uh, my husband's out of work, we're just living on uh, unemployment right now, and, but everybody in order uh, Dr. Armstrong encouraged everybody to enter into it, even if it was 5 cents a week. They felt part of the church and they felt they helped into building this new sanctuary that we're gonna build (mmm-hmm).

Jim: Uh, we've talked a lot of about the membership of the church. Anything else you would like to share with me about the membership of the church, anything unique about your church, other than it is a friendly church and a loving church, I've already found that out. But anything else about your assembly, your church you feel is unique? The membership....how do you think your people would react if uh, this is a little bit off what I asked you, you mentioned you would welcome anybody, black, white, or anybody? Do you have any black members in your church?

Roma: No, sir, we don't, we don't have any black people in our community at all.

Jim: Would you, do you think your church would welcome a black family if they came?

Roma: Oh, yes, definitely. We had uh, one of our members, Mabel Keiser, worked with a colored fellow up at Anderson-Newcomb's and uh, she invited him down one night to speak, asked if it would be alright, and we said, certainly, it'll be alright. And he came down and spoke and brought several of his members that were good

singers down with him. And they sat on the front row. And I don't believe that there was anybody in that church that didn't go up and hug 'em and uh, welcome them and invite them back anytime they could come back. (mmmh?!) I don't know, of course, you know, you don't know everybody's heart, I don't feel like we have any people that's really prejudiced to the degree that they would not welcome a colored person in the church. I know I worked with some at Cabell-Huntington that I would not care to go up and hug, any time. I really...I loved 'em. I really did, I grew to love 'em. I really did, I grew to love 'em while I worked with them.

Jim: Let me just review for a minute. Now, you said, you correct me if I'm wrong, you told me that from 1954 basically from '54 through '84 or to '82, when Dr. Armstrong came, the church just kind of went along and kind of existing?

Roma: Well, you know, we'd have maybe a year or two when there'd be like, like I read to you, 40 baptisms uh, it would seem to perk up just a little. I..I think the problem with our church and with a lot of the churches in the country today is the fact uh, they just do not get out and work in visitation uh, you know, Satan's got these people and he's...they're not going to come to us. We've got to go out and get them. And I just don't think that we have the minister that would stress that, see. We just didn't have one in that period of time, to really stress visitation.

Jim: So, community, you're talking about community penetration, you feel like that's the difference now? (mmm-hmm) You're actually penetrating the community, your people are out there trying to talk to people about the Lord?

Roma: We have a visitation program set up that Dr. Armstrong, when he came here, and when we first started this program, we had 60 people out every Wednesday night, knocking on doors, we'd go either by 2's or 3's because as you know nowadays, uh, if a woman's not with a man when they knock on a door and there's a woman at the house alone, she's not gonna let 'em in. So, we're uh, we've got a real good visitation program going. We've just got so many programs that I'd never heard of, you know, prior to Dr. Armstrong coming.

Jim: Do you think this church has been beneficial to the community over the last 20 years? Has it been an active force in the betterment of Ceredo?

Roma: I feel like it has (in what areas, give me some examples), well, we've had people stand up and say, out in the church that that church was a, played a big factor in their life. Uh, through the Sunday School program, through the uh, loving concern that I think we show to people uh, you let somebody be real sick in this community and there are several people from our church at their door, offering to do anything they can to help. (even non-members?) Yes, oh, yes, yes, and you left just like, well, for instance, uh, Mrs. Kidd passed away, that's a former member of our church that moved their letter out to Locust Grove; there was

a misunderstanding about re-baptism or if you come in to our church from another denomination, they request you be baptized into our church. There was something about that that they changed in the constitution one time and these people left our church and went off to Locust Grove, well, her mother passed away day before yesterday, and uh, we take food to the home and uh, I mean, her husband comes here to see me and gets his blood pressure taken and we're just like we've always been. It's just like, uh, it's just like a big family, and even though people leave and go somewhere else, we don't shun 'em. You know, we're still friends with 'em.

Jim: Has there ever been any large groups of people leave at one time out of this church?

Roma: No, sir, well, now, one time back and I don't know when, way back, they had a split and that's what started the little baptist church up on the corner of B-Street, Grace Gospel (Grace Missionary Baptist Church?) mmm-hmm, that was a split from our church. (I see) And I think it was over a minister.

Jim: But that was before you...

Roma: Yeah, that was before my time. I...

Jim: I'm talking about in the last 20 years. (oh, no, no, no) You've had people come and go obviously, (yeah), but never any large (no, un-huh_).

Roma: Just maybe two or three a year sometimes not even that many (mmm-hmm). Uh, we've really had...I've really...I've got an envelope about that thick of letters that's been requested since Dr. Armstrong came, from other churches. (mmm-hmm) But I haven't sent out very many this year at all. (right, well...) I think I've sent out about three.

Jim: Let me ask you just a couple more questions. One of the questions is, how important do you and you've already answered this in a way, but let me get you to answer it again. How important do you feel leadership, I'm talking about pastor, deacons, how important is that kind of leadership to your church and it's activity in the community?

Roma: Well, I feel like it's very important.

Jim: What I'm asking you is if you have a strong, dynamic leader and that's how you characterize Dr. Armstrong, do you feel that is the main uh, purpose in his being here is to motivate the church members and to keep them active in doing things (mmm-hmm), you feel like that's why, that's what his job is to keep you all motivated? What about the deacons? How do you see their responsibilities?

Roma: Well, they uh, they kind of keep him in a straight line (laughs). They're kind of, they kind of shephard him along. Uh, they make a lot of decisions to keep him from having to. Uh, you

know, I don't care who the minister is, you know, there's gonna be people not agree with him on everything he says and everything he does. We've already had that. We had some, the ones that left our church, left because Dr. Armstrong wanted the parsonage done over a little bit, 'cause he and his wife had king-size furniture and you can't fit king-size furniture in a little cubbyhole, so, they wanted a wall knocked out to enlarge the bedroom. Some of 'em got mad about that, said it was good enough for Hubert Six, why wasn't it good enough for him? And uh, of course, you know, as you know, it...there's not a perfect church. If there was, I'd be knocking on it's door tomorrow. But uh, we lost ...we lost about five people over that (mmm-hmm). But we've gained a whale of a lot more. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Alright, let me ask you one more question. How...how do you feel in the last 20 years of the needs of the community or the uh, things of ...things in the world have influenced the programs of the church? Now let me give you an example, then you can answer it as best you can. Uh, let's say a flood comes, and uh, you all need to change your program to meet the needs of the community where that you know, that flood has wiped all of the people out like it did in 1937 and so forth. How much of an influence does community need have upon your church? Will the church be flexible enough to meet the needs of the community?

Roma: Uh-huh, we have in the two communities, what they call the ministerial association, and each church as far as I know, I know ours participates in uh, relief program. They have a, it's located in the basement of the 1st Baptist Church of Kenova, and it's uh, I forget what they call it. But people that are out of work can go down there and get food, clothing, money if it's needed for medicine. Uh, we contribute not only food, we bring food into the church and it's taken down there, but we contribute so much money toward that. If somebody comes to our church and uh, says so and so got burned out, we have a big shower. (mmm-hmm) They lost a lot of their kitchen stuff, bathroom stuff, uh, we just wouldn't turn anybody...anybody that would need help, we've got, we've also in our church and not associated with the other churches, we have a benevolent uh, fund that my husband started uh, anybody this past winter there was two or three families that their husbands got out of work, they take up a collection every Sunday from the men's classes and my son Mike is in charge of that (mmm-hmm). And they don't let nobody's gas get turned off, or electric get turned off or need food, or if they kids need shoes, they go buy the shoes. It's just kind of watched close because as you know some people will use you, in the church as well as anywhere else, and we've had that tried a couple of times. Uh, but uh, anybody thats in real need and our church hears about it, they get taken care of immediately. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: If you had to uh, make a...make a determination as to what your church would be like five years from now, could you make an evaluation, could you give me some idea what you think the church...if it continues to go the way it's going now?

Roma: Well...

Jim: Do you think...what I'm asking you, do you think the new building...let's say you get a new building in two years, you have a new building, do you think that's gonna change the church at all?

Roma: No, except it's gonna...it's gonna help us go out, go out and really I think fight harder to get more people in because as my husband said, right now we're busting at the seams, we can't handle...if all the people came that belonged to our church, we couldn't handle it. (mmm-hmm) We don't have the room for it. We can only seat something like 250 people. So, it's a small church. Uh, I think it will encourage us to go after people more even than what we're doing. (mm-hmm) Uh, ...

Jim: Have the people in the last 20 years changed? The same people that have been coming to the church the last 20?

Roma: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm (how have they change?). Some of 'em have changed ...they've changed their ways of thinking about things like we've got some of the older like I say, the older people get in a rut and they want to stay there. They don't want nothing changed in their church. They don't want anything new. No new ideas, no new ways of doing it, it's been alright these thirty years you know, let it go, let's go on. And we've got some that uh, that have changed their thinking a lot. A couple of our elder deacons have uh, decided it's alright to eat in the fellowship hall, uh, I can't think....

Jim: When did they change their minds about these things? Why did they change?

Roma: I think because of scripture, it was showed to 'em scripturally. Christ ate with the disciples, uh, ever' time Christ sat down a lot of times it was to eat uh, even though some of the you know, Pharisees and Sadducee's thought he was picking the wrong people to eat with. (laughter) Uh, fellowship has a great deal to do I think, with the life of your church. If you don't have fellowship, then you just might as well forget it. 'Cause you're gonna end up with a non-caring church. I think thats one reason that our church has the name of being a loving, caring church is that we do have a lot of fellowship. We use to have uh, fellowship dinners every Wednesday night before church, 'cause we would come out and eat dinner, and then go visit and come back and give our report as to how our visits went. The first time...the first time I went with uh, Fred Adkins. I had never been visiting as uh, this type of visitation. I had visited people, you know, but not going out two by two, sixty people. And we...a girl was saved the very first home we went to (mmmh). She's a very strong member in our church now and sings in the choir, and her whole family, seven of her family were baptized at one time, and that was for going after Brenda, and continuing to go back. You see, we don't just go back once. Use to be we'd go once and if they'd say no, then you just forgot about it. That

was it. Dr. Armstrong don't always take no for an answer. Uh, he may send two different people back to that home next week and if it doesn't work, then he'll go. And he does have a way of presenting the scripture to people. That's something else he's really, it's really, and he was, he said that when he was a young boy in high school, he started preachin' when he was 17, but when he was a young boy in high school, he was so backward and so bashful, he was born in Arkansas, that he wouldn't even look at a girl, no less speak to her and I said, boy, you've come a long way. This is his third wife. He lost two wives to cancer. (is that right?) He lost one cancer of the breast, the other one had leukemia. And Shirley lost her husband and uh, this is his third wife, and we just love 'em.

Jim: Uh, one more thing and I'll be done. I told you that twice already. But uh, this just came to my mind. You said, well, a few times in the last 20 years when baptisms would be up a little bit, things would look like they're perking up and then they'd drop off again, what do you think caused those little fluctuation like that? Can you think of anything that might of at one time, you think...?

Roma: Hi there. (tape shuts off)

Jim: I had just asked you whether or not, or what you thought caused these periodic fluctuations in the baptisms and ...

Roma: I would say that it was the minister at that time uh, back in '68 and around in that area was one time that we had several and that was when Brother Kesseee was here, and he was pretty, he was a pretty dynamic preacher from the pulpit. He was strong. Uh, (do you think people come to hear good preachin', is that the idea?) I...I they definitely do, they definitely do.

Jim: So if you have a pastor who is a good preacher, interesting to listen to, a man who communicates and is personable, do you think that's gonna have more to do with the church? (and preaches the scriptures) Well, obviously he preaches the word, yes. But I mean, he's...he communicates well, he's dynamic as you've said, like Dr. Armstrong, so you say Reverend Kesseee was a man who was a kind of that guy, that type of guy.

Roma: He was...he was, now he would tell you he didn't like to visit. He did not like to visit. And I think that's a very important part of a pastor's duty, well, not so much a duty but ...I just think they need to visit, visit the congregation.

Jim: The other pastors uh, pretty much were not that kind of ... (right) ...they didn't visit much.

Roma: Uh, if you're...like my mother-in-law was ill for two years and our minister at that time who was Brother Six, uh, I didn't see him over three times in that two years. (mmm-hmm) He would have come if I had called him, I don't mean to sound like he wouldn't have come even if I called him. Any of them you know,

cold church that isn't going anywhere, 'cause I know that was what we were. We were not going anywhere. We were in a rut. And we stayed in that rut. And uh, 'til Dr. Armstrong came and boy, he has pulled us up by our bootstraps, and we're just, we're the first in West Virginia in the Southern Baptist con..you know, and with the Southern Baptist here in West Virginia, we're the first to baptize a hundred people. Now, I don't mean that we're going out and dragging people in to baptize 'em to say we've baptized a hundred people. He's very careful about talking to these people, making sure they know what they're doing. Uh, then we also have a program that we never had before, it's a follow-up program and my husband was instrumental in that, in that he says that you know, you don't bring these people in, baptize 'em, bring 'em in to the fellowship of believers and then forget about 'em, 'cause they're babies, they got to be nurtured and fed, so we started a program called survival kit. And the new converts go to this class and and uh, that helps 'em along plus, we're gonna try to get some Bible study groups started, like my son has. Uh, it's surprising what, now that's 18 to 36, in his age group; he's 24. Uh, it's surprising how they'll open up and talk about things in a home they will not, you know, talk in a church or any other meeting. And their little group has been successful in helping other kids that's having a rough time of it, new believers that has problems, some of 'em the same problems J.D. had (right), he can help 'em.

Jim: Okay, well I think that'll pretty much conclude the other things I'd like to ask, but I think I'll conclude this discussion today and thank you for your time. And this will conclude the discussion with uh, Mrs. J.J. Billups from the 20 year or 30 year history of 1st Baptist Church of Ceredo.

END OF INTERVIEW